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ABSTRACT

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INDUCING ATTITUDINAL CHANGE AMONG LIBRARIANS

AN EVALUATION OF THE INSTITUTE ON PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE TO THE INNER CITY

by

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Abstract

Using the Semantic Differential, the attitudes of thirty-five public librarians participating in a training program on library service to the inner city were measured before and after the conference. A group of thirty public librarians in similar positions in large cities was randomly selected and measured with the same instrument to serve as a basis of comparison and control. Three of the five concepts tested--Community Involvement in Planning Library Programs, The Urban Poor, and Library Institutes as Educational Devices, underwent statistically significant changes as a result of the five-day institute. Comparing the post-test scores of participants and the control group reveals that participants' opinions of four of the five issues moved in the opposite direction from the views of their colleagues. A discussion of two competing theories of why attitudes change in institute settings--interpersonal context versus ideational content follows, with hypotheses for testing their relative influence.

Inducing Attitudinal Change Among Librarians:

An Evaluation of the Institute on Public Library Service to the Inner City

Educational institutes have different purposes, ranging from dispensing information about new techniques and materials to altering opinions, values and behavior of its trainees. The kind of evaluation -- its design and instruments-- will vary with the specific purpose and scope of the training program. However, the common goal of training programs is change in people -- of attitudes, of knowledge, of awareness. Therefore, the common objective of evaluative research is to provide a scientific assessment of whether the desired changes occurred as a result of the program. (Suchman, 1967, p. 29) The search for significant change is the guiding principal of this evaluation of a training program for public librarians.

Description of the Training Program

From March 15 to March 20, 1970, the Institute for "Public Library Service to the Inner City" was held at the University at Urbana.[1] The institute was advertised via professional journals and mailed leaflets to attract potential participants. Thirty-five applicants, most of whom were public librarians already committed to and involved in urban library programs were selected.

As understood by the evaluator, the Institute planners hoped to change the attitudes and views of the participants by:

a) increasing their understanding of the nature and causes of urban social problems,

b) increasing their awareness of the variety of alternative solutions,

c) expanding their perception of the public library's potential in helping to meet urban changes.

The strategy of this institute was to expose participants to a wide variety of controversial ideas, media programs and people. Rather than trying to "sell" participants on a unified plan, philosophy, or activity, the plan was to introduce realism, variety and controversy into the program. The institute group was exposed to five days of information ranging from academic reports of research studies, reviews of personal library experience to reports of participants' own programs. Representatives of both successful and unsuccessful library programs served as resource persons. Speakers with different points of view, personal experiences and levels of optimism about the city's future were invited to voice their ideas. They included university professors, high level library administrators and professional community organizers. In addition to listening to others, the Institute participants saw films and gave talks.

Goals and Design of the Evaluation

The plan of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the institute in accomplishing its goals. What influence did this exposure to a variety of opinions, information,

suggestions and themes have on the librarians? How and in what direction were their opinions and concepts changed?

The Instrument: In order to assess changes in participants' attitudes and opinions, a semi-projective instrument, the Semantic Differential was used to measure the meaning of the program's central themes. (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1957)

A positive stance toward the first concept, Community Involvement in Planning Library Programs, was one of the few overt "messages" of the conference, representing a liberal progressive attitude toward expanding the public's role in making library decisions formerly made only by trained professionals. This debate is similar to the current concern of college administration and faculty confronted by students who want more power in decision making.

Store-front Libraries was included to assess participants' attitudes toward a currently popular idea in Urban libraries. Usually found in slum areas, Store-front libraries are an attempt to bring existing library functions closer to the local residents by moving book collections from traditional sites to more accessible street locations.

The third concept, The Library's Potential Role in Serving the Inner City, serves as a measure of optimism and hope for the urban library's future. Like other service institutions in the central city, public libraries face grave financial and social problems such as schools, hospitals and welfare services,

which threaten its existence in its current form.

Since The Urban Poor are the people to be served by the library, information about librarians' attitudes toward them is extremely important.

Finally, we included the concept Library Institutes as Educational Devices to get information about the participants' view of the value of this form of training. The concept was worded to elicit attitudes toward the general method of communication, rather than their evaluation of this particular training institute.

Each respondent rated each of these concepts against nine semantic differential scales. Three scales (good-bad, unsuccessful-successful, and beneficial-harmful) represented the evaluative dimension, three (soft-hard, free-constrained, and powerless-powerful) for the potency factor, and three (fast-slow, cautious-rash, passive-active) for the activity dimension. Design: A comparison of persons' opinions and attitudes before and after the institute was deemed necessary to document any changes in their concepts and attitudes.

The Semantic Differential was sent to the thirty-five participating librarians and all participants returned the forms one month before the institute. On the last day of the meetings they took the same test; the difference between these two tests constitutes a measure of the effects of the institute on their opinions and ideas.

In addition, a control group of public librarians closely resembling the sample group in position and city size was selected and measured. Using the American Library Directory we selected thirty-five library positions from thirty-five randomly selected cities with populations over 100,000. The librarians currently in these positions were sent the same instrument about one month before the institute. Twenty-eight anonymous questionnaires were returned; but one arrived too late to be included. In addition, one respondent had given copies to three of his librarians directly involved in an urban library project. This added bonus contributed three more questionnaires for a combined response rate of 79%. We matched the positions of the control group with those of the participants whenever possible; however, many participants held newly created positions (such as "special programs coordinator") which were not listed in the Directory. In cases where matching was not possible, an equal proportion of top and middle administrators versus branch librarians was randomly selected. This control group serves as a comparison or benchmark to see whether participating librarians were significantly different from librarians who did not or could not attend this institute.

TABLE I

Percentage Distribution of Background Characteristics of Institute and Control Groups

		Control Group	Institute Group
Sex:	Male	37%	31%
	Female	63	69
		100%	100%
		(30)	(35)
Age:	24-34	23%	29%
	35-44	17	21
	45-54	37	29
	55 +	23	21
		100%	100%
		(30)	(34)
Position:			
Top-Director, Head Associate		30%	12%
Middle: Special Project Coordinator		27	38
Local: Asst. Br. Lib. Branch Lib.		33	27
Other		10	24
		100%	101%
		(30)	(34)
Race:	White	87%	66%
	Non-white	13	34
		100%	100%
		(30)	(35)
Education:			
College Degree		23%	30%
Master's Degree		67	70
Post-Masters Work		10	0
		100%	100%
		(30)	(33)
Library Degree:			
BLS-MLS		78%	85%
Non-Library Science		22	15
		100%	100%
		(27)	(33)
Year of Last LS Degree			
Before 1960		62%	50%
1960 & After		38	50
		100%	100%
		(24)	(28)

The background characteristics of the control and the institute groups are shown in Table 1. The most obvious difference between the two groups is race; understandably, the topic of Service to the Inner City attracted a disproportionate number of blacks. Another difference between the two groups appeared in the recency of their library training. Although not reflected in their ages, the institute librarians had received their professional training more recently than the control librarians. Fifty percent had finished library school since 1960, compared to 38% of the control group.

Finally, there are differences in their library positions. Partly due to the effort to recruit action-oriented librarians, a larger proportion of the institute group (13 out of 35) had positions such as urban project directors or assistants and community coordinators. Top administrators were under represented in the institute group, (12% as compared with 30% of the control group).

There were no significant differences between the two groups in their sex, age, education or kind of training. Both groups were predominantly female, 40% to 50% under 45 years of age, with masters' degrees mostly in library science. The participants over-represented blacks, urban program librarians and recently-trained persons. Clearly the Institute attracted a special interest group within the occupation. This selective composition of the institute group partially explains their stated interest in getting practical advice

and actual solutions. These librarians already have the interest in establishing innovative library programs, so they want concrete programs, suggestions and plans.

TABLE 2

Comparison Between Institute and Control Groups on Total and Component Means

Concept	Control				Institute (1st measurement)			
	Eval.	Pot.	Act.	$\bar{x}$	Eval.	Pot.	Act.	$\bar{x}$
1) Community Involvement	4.03	.83	-1.93	.97	5.81	2.15	- .06	2.63*
2) Store-front Libraries	5.62	1.62	1.65	2.96	4.50	2.43	1.34	2.75
3) Library's Potential Role in Serving the Inner City	5.30	2.06	1.13	2.83	6.00	3.21	.56	3.25
4) The Urban Poor	-1.43	-1.33	- .56	-1.10	.40	-1.06	-1.20	- .62
5) Library Institutes	5.73	1.13	- .03	2.27	6.29	2.45	1.74	3.49**

* The difference between the concept means of the control and institute groups is significant at .05 level.

** Significant at .10 level.

How does the Institute group compare with the non-Institute group in their opinions before they attended the conference? Table 2 shows both the overall concept means and those of the three component dimensions (evaluation, potency and activity) for the two groups of librarians. The means can range between -9.00 [extremely bad, weak or inactive] and +9.00 [extremely good, strong or active]. A mean score around 0.0 shows that

the group felt that both adjectives were neutral or did not apply to the concept. Using the Mann-Whitney U test (Siegel, 1956, pp. 116-126),[2] significant differences were found in the overall meanings of two of the five concepts - Community Involvement and Institutes as Educational Devices.

Community Involvement in Planning Library Programs: This concept was scored at about half of its maximum positive evaluation by both groups, but the Institute group was about 35% higher than control (5.8 to 4.0). On potency, the control judged Community Involvement to be nearly neutral (.83) while the Institute group gave it a moderate rating of 2.15, or 2 1/2 times the control rating. It appears that this institute attracted librarians who already saw significant value in including local community members in planning library programs.

Library Institutes as Educational Devices: Both institutes and non-institute groups had equally favorable opinions of library institutes but they diverged on the other two dimensions. Librarians who attended the institute came with the view that institutes are a powerful and active means of education, while the non-institute group saw institutes as weaker and more passive. It seems that having a favorable opinion of institutes is a necessary but not sufficient condition for attracting participants. The deciding factor is the belief and expectation that attending these programs is a meaningful active step towards solving the library's problems.

The meanings of the other three (Store-front Libraries, Libraries' Potential and Urban Poor) connoted basically the same things for both groups.

Summarizing the initial differences between the librarians who attended the training program and a control group of public librarians from similar sized cities, who did not, we find both background and attitudinal differences. The institute attracted more blacks, more recently-trained professionals and more librarians in action--oriented positions. The participants had a more positive attitude toward community participation on library affairs and the value of training institutes in helping them find solutions to the urban library's problems.

Effects of the Institute

Table 3 shows the change in the meanings of the five concepts for the institute group, by comparing their judgments made before and immediately after the institute.

TABLE 3

Change From Pre-test to Post-test for Institute Group

Concept	Change on: Evaluation	Potency	Activity
1) Community Involvement	+(.06)*	+(.04)*	-(.66)
2) Store-front Libraries	-(.68)	-(.06)*	-(.60)
3) Library's Potential Role in Serving the Inner City	+(.22)	+(.62)	+(.38)
4) The Urban Poor	+(.50)	+(.16)	+(.20)
5) Institutes as Educational Devices	-(.36)	-(.20)	-(.01)*

The direction of the change is indicated by the sign--a plus sign means that the judgment on the post-test was more favorable, more potent or more active than in the pre-test. A negative sign means that the group judged the concept to be less favorable, less powerful or less active after the institute than before. The statistical significance level of the difference between first and second measurements (D) is shown within the parentheses, as measured by the Wilcoxin Matched-Pairs Test (Siegel, 1956, pp. 75-82). As in interpreting all significance levels, the lower the figure, the more statistically significant the difference. The statistically significant changes are starred in the table.

Four of the fifteen comparisons are statistically significant at the .10 level and several others show quite substantial shifts, indicating that participation in the program did change some views of the members. It is, of course, important to recognize the possibility of regression; however the high reliability of semantic differential factor-scores in a test-retest situation reduces this danger (Osgood et al., 1957, p. 138).

Community Involvement in Planning Library Programs: Two statistically significant differences occurred in the judgment of this concept. After the institute, the participating members had an more favorable opinion of seeking out the wishes of community residents when planning library programs. This concept received more explicit emphasis during the meeting than

any other of the tested concepts, for several speakers emphasized the absolute necessity of this concept in planning programs. One speaker blamed the failure of a project on the lack of effective involvement.

Store-Front Libraries: One important change in the attitudes toward store-front libraries was a statistically significant decrease in the potency dimension. After participating in the conference, the librarians felt that store-front libraries were much weaker programs than they had thought earlier, or that the problems were much greater. This may be in response to suggestions made during the institute to break out of the traditional concept of library service--waiting for people to come into an existing location, even a physically close one. Another possibility is that librarians recognized the magnitude and perversity of the inner city's social, economic and political problems. Whatever the particular reason, participants left viewing store-front libraries as a rather conservative, pallid measure.

Library's Potential Role in Serving the Inner City: Two substantial shifts in opinion are noted. After the institute, the group saw the library's role as more favorable and more active than before the meetings. In view of the failures reported on and the controversies aired, this growth of optimism is probably one of the most meaningful effects of the conference.

Urban Poor: Starting from a pre-institute judgment of the urban

poor as slightly good, rather weak and passive, after the conference the participants rated the urban poor to be more favorable, stronger and more active. This concept was one of the most susceptible to influence through institute activities.

Library Institutes as Educational Devices: Of all the concepts tested, this one changed the most, but in a negative direction. After the conference the group felt that library institutes were somewhat less valuable, less powerful and significantly less active a medium than they had thought earlier. These changes can be interpreted either as a negative evaluation of this particular institute or a disenchantment with the general idea of talking about bad conditions and needed changes. The first interpretation is doubtful for first, special care was taken to phrase the concept to refer to the general notion of educational institutes, and secondly participants responded to a more traditional evaluation of the Institute with glowing praise and satisfaction. Another possible negative evaluation of this particular institute may be participants failed to learn anything new; that they had read or heard all this before. Thus, as an educational experience, this institute may have failed.

However, it is more likely that the process of talking about and listening to others describe their attempts to set up new programs boomeranged. In grasping the enormities of the economic, political and social challenges ahead of the inner city library, the participants probably realized how little

talk contributed to solving these problems. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the downward shift of the activity factor of this concept is the strongest change experienced by the institute group.

To summarize how the ideas and opinions of those who attended the institute changed, we compared them with the control group as a benchmark. Table 4 contrasts the three group means--the control group, the institute group pre-test and post-test. The institute group diverged from the non-institute group in their judgments of the first four concepts. Two of these differences were statistically significant, while a third previously significant difference in the last concept lost ground.

TABLE 4

Comparison of Concept Means of
Control Group, Institute Group Pre-Test
and Institute Group Post-Test

Concept	Control Group Mean	Institute pre-test Mean	Institute post-test Mean	Direction of change
1. Community Involvement	.97	2.63*	3.24*	divergence
2. Store-front Libraries	2.96	2.75	2.39	divergence
3. Library's Potential	2.83	3.25	3.44	divergence
4. Urban Poor	-1.10	- .62	.21*	divergence
5. Library Institutes	2.27	3.49*	2.55	convergence

* The difference between the Institute and control group mean is significant at .10 level.

The first concept, Community Involvement shows more divergence between the two groups than before the institute. The participants see the idea of community involvement in deciding on library programs as much more favorable, more powerful and less passive than the control group.

The image of the Urban Poor is also significantly different after the institute. The institute group came with an idea no different from the control group, but left the conference seeing the urban poor as more worthy and more powerful than did those who did not attend the meetings. Participants' judgments about Store-front Libraries and the Library's Potential Role also diverged from the views of non-participants but not enough to be statistically significant.

In only one concept, Library Institutes as Educational Devices did the conference act to bring the views of the two groups together. After the institute, the participants left with an identical opinion of library institutes held by the control group, whereas they came to the meetings with and perhaps because of a significantly different view. On the whole, after the training program, the participants' opinions of some key issues moved in the opposite direction from the views of a control group of colleagues.

By comparing the men and women, blacks and whites, old and young it was possible to see if these factors affected the direction or magnitude of opinion change. However, no con-

sistent differences were found, indicating that sex, race and age were unrelated to receptivity or resistance to influences within this group.

Summary and Conclusion

This evaluation asked "What effect, if any, did this five-day conference have on the people who attended it?" To answer this question we tested them before and after the institute and compared their responses with those of a control group of librarians from similar-sized cities. We found that the librarians recruited to this institute were somewhat different, both in backgrounds and ideas, as measured by the semantic differential test.

Comparing the before and after scores of the institute group, we found that the members underwent significant changes in the way they judged some central ideas in the institute. Three of the concepts--Community Involvement in Planning Library Programs, The Urban Poor and Library Institutes as Educational Devices were the subjects of significant opinion change. As a result of the conference, the participants rated the community's role and the urban poor more positively than before. The notion of library institutes as educational devices lost considerable appeal as a strong, active means of social change.

Overall, the librarians who attended this institute returned home with some different ideas than they brought. They also returned home even more different from librarian

colleagues who did not attend the institute. So, the institute intensified some existing differences in perspective, created new ones and ameliorated another.

The question of what actually caused these attitudinal changes is a moot one. Was it that this conference assembled a voluntary group of likeminded persons with common interests and commitment whose interaction influenced one another, or did the training program with its barrage of ideas, experiences and controversy produce the attitudinal changes? The voluntary nature of the institute (which is the norm among most professional retraining conferences) proscribed the kind of research design necessary to answer this question. In order to separate the effects of group interaction and persuasion from the training program, the evaluator must be able to vary the group compostiton, so he can compare attitude changes within a heterogeneous non-voluntary group with those in a more homogeneous self-selected group like this. Until this is done, it is difficult for evaluation researchers to pinpoint the causal factors that operate in intensive educational institutes of this type.

The importance of this question is evident when one tries to estimate how long these new perspectives and opinions will last after participants return to their positions. One could hypothesize that if the interpersonal factor is mainly responsible for producing opinion change in a conference setting, then the changes will be relatively short-lived once the reinforcing

social context is dispersed. The fact that such conferences tend to draw people with atypical attitudes and make them even more divergent from their colleagues implies that the reality shock upon returning will extinguish attitudinal shifts rather quickly.

The alternative hypothesis bodes more hope for longer-lived effects of such training conferences. If the attitudes of institute participants are changed predominantly by exposure to fresh ideas and perspectives, as presented by speakers, discussants and films, then it seems that the participants will retain their new perspectives longer, due to the fact that the participants have access to the ideational content through other media, such as professional journals and publications. These alternative sources of ideas and perspectives that are independent of the social context will reinforce the attitudinal changes after participants return to their positions.

The relative importance of the social context versus ideational content as change agents in conference situations is an important question which has implications for planning training conferences. Questions such as the type of participants to be recruited, the relative emphasis on formal versus informal structure, and the kinds of media to be used face all institute and program planners. Ideally, their decisions should be based on the results of objective evaluational research.

Footnotes

[1] The conference was funded by USOE Grant # OEG-0-9-230003-1020 for the complete descriptive account of this program, see the "Narrative Evaluation of the Institute for Public Library Service to the Inner City", submitted to USOE by Terence Crowley, director, May, 1970.

[2] Since the institute group is a self-selected, thus non-random sample, non-parametric statistics were used, which are distribution-free.

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